



# Shiga Toxin Producing *E. Coli* (STEC)

## What is STEC?

Some types of *E. coli* cause disease by making a toxin called Shiga toxin. The bacteria that make these toxins are called “Shiga toxin-producing” *E. coli*, or STEC for short. STEC live in the guts of ruminant animals, including cattle, goats, sheep, deer, and elk. The major source for human illnesses is cattle. STEC that cause human illness generally do not make animals sick. Most people with a STEC infection start feeling sick 3 to 4 days after eating or drinking something that contains the bacteria. However, illnesses can start anywhere from 1 to 10 days after exposure. Some patients, typically children under 10 years old, with STEC infection develop hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS), a severe complication that can be fatal.

### What is the burden of STEC each year in the United States?

- 265,00 illnesses
- 3,600 hospitalizations
- 30 deaths

### What are common symptoms of STEC?

- Severe stomach cramps
- Diarrhea (often bloody)
- Vomiting
- Less common symptoms include:  
Fever

### How can I prevent STEC?

- Wash your hands after using the restroom, changing diapers, or petting animals. Wash your hands before preparing food.
- Cook meats thoroughly.
- Avoid raw milk, unpasteurized dairy products, and unpasteurized juices.
- Avoid swallowing water when swimming or playing in lakes, ponds, streams, swimming pools, and backyard “kiddie” pools.
- Prevent cross contamination in food preparation areas by thoroughly washing hands, counters, cutting boards, and utensils after they touch raw meat.

### How are infections spread?

- Consumption of contaminated food
- Consumption of unpasteurized (raw) milk
- Consumption of water that has not been disinfected
- Contact with cattle
- Contact with the feces of infected people.